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PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBO #8160 3251152
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 211152Z NOV 07
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0210
INFO RUEHSW/AMEMBASSY BERN PRIORITY 1326
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 7879
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 9565
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 5655
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 0024
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY 0847
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 1113
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 6317
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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS BOGOTA 008160

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: CHAVEZ' PROPOSAL FOR MEETING WITH FARC'S MARULANDA
ELICITS GOC TIME LIMIT ON "HUMANITARIAN EXCHANGE" TALKS

REF: BOGOTA 7648

SUMMARY

¶1. On November 20, in response to Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez' public statement that he received GOC authorization for a meeting with FARC leader Manuel Marulanda, the GOC issued a communique clarifying that such a meeting could only occur after the FARC began to release its hostages. The GOC also set a deadline of December 31 for the Chavez humanitarian exchange efforts with the FARC. END SUMMARY.

¶2. On November 19, on the eve of a planned meeting with French President Nicolas Sarkozy in Paris, Chavez told the media that President Alvaro Uribe had authorized a Chavez-Marulanda meeting--possibly in the previously demilitarized (1998-2002, "despeje") zone of Caguan--as part of his efforts to negotiate a "humanitarian exchange" of FARC-held hostages for FARC prisoners in Colombian jails. Chavez added that Uribe might also attend the meeting. The statements came amidst Colombian media speculation over whether Chavez would provide proof of life from the FARC during his Paris meetings.

¶3. The GOC quickly released a communique clarifying Uribe's offer, and setting a time limit on Chavez' efforts. Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo told the media that Uribe made the Marulanda offer to Chavez in secret during the November 8-10 Ibero-American for Chavez to use as a "negotiating tool." Chavez had promised Uribe at the October 12 Guajira summit that he would limit comments to the media on the exchange process (reftel). The communique added that a Marulanda meeting would only be authorized if the "FARC released a group of hostages in its power, with the commitment to release all hostages, including the three North Americans."

¶4. Restrepo added that a meeting in Caguan would be authorized only with clear rules, international assistance, and for the purpose of initiating a formal peace process with the FARC. He added, "President Uribe told President Chavez that the mediation effort should have a time limit. Today the

Government thinks that the limit should be the month of December."

¶15. Restrepo said in several media interviews that the FARC would attempt to endlessly delay the exchange process to gain international recognition, and he reminded the media that in early 2007 the FARC promised the Spanish, French, and Swiss they would provide proof of life for the hostages. To date, the FARC has not provided proof of life.

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